



# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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### NATION'S WETLANDS LOSS EXAMINED IN NEW PUBLICATION

America had about 215 million acres of wetlands at the time of colonial settlement. It has less than half that amount today. A special report, published recently by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, outlines the various kinds of wetlands and documents their loss in a summary fashion. Entitled "Wetlands of the United States: Current Status and Recent Trends," the publication identifies portions of the country hardest hit by wetlands loss and statistically examines recent trends.

The study found that approximately 87 percent of the Nation's total wetland loss has been caused by agricultural development. Urban development accounted for some 8 percent of the total, while the remainder was due to natural losses or other forms of development.

Wetlands are regarded by biologists as the single most productive habitat for wildlife. They are especially important to North American waterfowl -- ducks, geese, and swans. In the northern tier, wetlands offer nesting and rearing habitat for these migratory species. In southern realms, they provide valuable wintering habitat. They also offer breeding and rearing habitat for a diversity of game and non-game species such as deer, raccoon, turkey, squirrel and song birds. The relatively shallow waters of wetlands are also used by fish as nurseries for their young.

Aside from their wildlife value, swamps, sloughs, lakes, and rivers function as natural purifiers of water supplies and help to replenish stores of groundwater by slowing runoff.

Copies of the report are available from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20242. Orders should refer to the title, GPO Stock Number 024-010-00656-1, and include a check for \$3.

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